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www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/senator/kuipers/

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Sen. Kuipers' effort to promote pier safety heads to House

LANSING — Legislation that toughens penalties for stealing life-saving devices from piers and beaches won approval recently in the Michigan Senate and now goes to the House.

Sen. Wayne Kuipers, R-Holland, sponsored the legislation after local leaders shared the need for increased awareness about the dangers of rip currents and playing on piers and the need to reduce the number of life preservers stolen.

Kuipers' legislation would make it a misdemeanor for anyone who tampers with or steals a marine-safety device maintained by the state or a local government. If a person dies or becomes permanently disabled because the device was unavailable or unusable, the offender can be found guilty of a felony.

"People should know that while stealing life preservers might seem like an innocent prank, it seriously jeopardizes the safety of every person who uses our state's piers and beaches," Kuipers said. "Our coastlines and piers must remain safe."

Related resolutions urge the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to increase public awareness and notification of rip currents in the Great Lakes and call on the Michigan Department of Education to teach pupils about the dangers of rip currents and learn basic pier safety.

One of the chief advocates is Vicki Cech of Grand Haven. Cech lost her son, 17-year-old Andy Fox, in 2003 when he was swept away in a rip current at the Grand Haven pier. In testimony before a Senate committee, Cech pressed for legislation that would crack down on people who steal life preservers from the piers and beaches. She said 22 life preservers were stolen locally in 2005.

Besides pushing for tougher laws, Cech and other members of the Great Lakes Beach and Pier Safety Task Force have created informational material to educate people how to use piers safely and about the dangers of rip currents. The group's Web site is located at www.respectthepower.org.

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